Joint Tax Staff Regarded as Best on Hill

By Spencer Rich 4/4/74
Washington Post Staff Writer

When members of Congress get legislative advice from Larry Woodworth, the 56-year-old soft-spoken son of an Ohio Baptist preacher, they listen with special care and respect.

For Woodworth—who heads the staff of the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation which has just issued a devastating report on President Nixon's taxes—has a universal reputation as one of the best, perhaps the very best, staff man on Capitol Hill.

And the 40-member staff over which Woodworth has ridden herd for the past 10 years is known as the ablest, most discreet, most savvy and most professional group of committee aides in Congress.

Few people on Capitol Hill and virtually no one off the hill—except the Treasury Department and the private tax lawyers and lobbyists—know much about the joint committee. Yet it is one of the most powerful in Congress, with tremendous influence over legislation affecting the lives of millions.

The joint committee, created under the Revenue Act of 1926, consists of members of the tax-writing committees—House Ways and Means and Senate Finance. The chairmanship alternates and the chairman this year is Sen. Russell B. Long (D-La.), with Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.) as vice chairman For years the Senate chairman was Harry Flood Byrd Sr. (D-Va.), an arch-conservative in fiscal matters.

The joint committee provides the major staff for both chambers of Congress on tax matters, and right now—in addition to Woodworth, who holds a doctorate in public administration and isn't an economist or a tax lawyer—it has 25 professional staff members.

Including secretarial and clerical positions, the total staff is about 40. The professional staff members include two legislative counsels, six legislative attorneys, six economists and a number of economic and tax-statistic analysts. Several of the members have accounting training as well. The staff has been built up as a civil service-type staff—nonpolitical and nonpartisan.

When a tax bill is before either Ways and Means or Finance or on the floor of either chamber, it is the business of the joint committee staff to draft the legislation, to write the reports and to be at the side of committee members to advise and assist four or five staffers are almost always seen on the House and Senate floors whenever a tax bill is being considered.

Woodworth gets $40,000 a year, the highest possible staff salary in Congress. With the committee since 1944, he is a master at trying to tailor and stitch the proposals of members into a coherent whole. He is the model civil servant—able, discreet, honest and hard-working, according to members and associates. He could probably triple his salary in private industry but he won't jump.

Second in command on the committee staff is Lincoln Arnold, 64, a one-time municipal judge in Thief River Falls, Minn., who was an Internal Revenue Service attorney, senior legislative counsel for the House, and worked in private practice for 15 years with Alvord and Alvord.

Another staff aide with a major role on the Nixon tax report is Bernard (Bobby) Shapiro, a soft-spoken lawyer in his early 30s with a trace of a drawl (he's from Richmond) and training in accountancy as well as law. Shapiro sometimes serves as a surrogate on the floor when Woodworth can't be there.

Assistant staff chief Herbert L. Chabot, 42, who comes from New York and got his law degree from Columbia, provided staff work on pension reform bills when they were considered by the Finance and Ways and Means committees.

From the start, a staff team worked extensively and virtually full time on the president's tax matters. It consisted of Woodworth, Arnold, Shapiro, attorney Mark McConaghy, attorney Paul Oosterhuis, accountant Allan Rosenbaum and economist James Wetzler. From time to time, other staffers pitched in, and at the end most of the staff was working to get the final report in shape.